

ADVENTURES

IN WESTERN NEW YORK HISTORY



The Canadian Shore

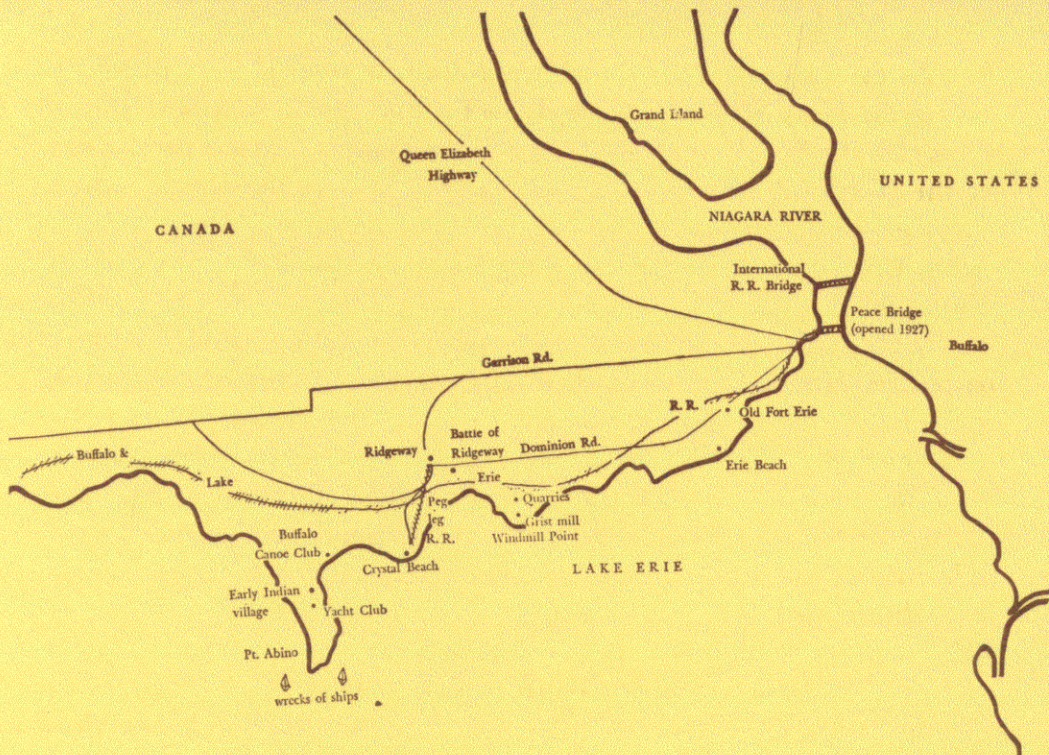
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THE
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The Canadian shoreline from Pt. Abino to Erie Beach

Janice Schwarz Willard



More than 1,000 morning papers were sold daily on these docks when seven and eight o'clock boats left.

Buffalo Courier-Express photo



The *Canadiana* made the 3 hour trip from Buffalo to Crystal Beach six times a day.

Buffalo Courier-Express photo

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THE CANADIAN SHORE
FROM
PT. ABINO TO ERIE BEACH

by Peter C. Andrews

Although we often think of large lakes and rivers as barriers and dividers between people, more often they serve to draw together those who live on opposite shores. The history of the Canadian shoreline of Lake Erie furnishes ample evidence of the dependence of Buffalonians upon the raw materials and the recreational facilities of Ontario; in their economic growth frontier Canadians relied heavily upon American visitors, and American markets.

Since the end of the War of 1812, and the limiting of naval forces on the Great Lakes by the Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1817, a monumental record of peace and unfortified borders has been maintained. This, together with the relative ease with which goods and people cross the national boundaries, and the natural advantages of easy water transportation has resulted in the linking of Canadian and American industry and society.

Because the shorelines contrast so sharply (the urban and industrial American side with the sand beaches, resort towns, and farms of the Canadian shore), Western New Yorkers have always found this easily accessible area an ideal retreat and playground. Perhaps the history of the Canadian shore has particular fascination for Buffalonians with fond memories of vacation fun and exploration of many of these sites.

It is in the spirit of mutual respect, pride in our neighborly and peaceful relationships, and warm nostalgia that we present episodes in the story of the Canadian shores of Lake Erie.

Point Abino

Point Abino, a summer colony located on the Canadian shore of Lake Erie about fifteen miles from Buffalo, is named for a French Jesuit priest, the Rev. Claude Aveneau, who lived there about 1690. First called Aveneau, then Abeneau and now shortened to Abino, the area still has many of the same qualities that so impressed the French priest years ago.

Father Aveneau was one of a number of early Jesuits who went into the Indian territories hoping to convert Indians to Christianity. He built a crude cabin atop one of the hills, and there he communed

with God to prepare himself for his many years of missionary work among the Miami Indians at the mouth of the St. Joseph River in Indiana.

The point commands a magnificent view of the lake and the broad sandy beaches of the nearby bays. Its dunes, some of them 75 feet high, still are impressive, although hundreds of tons of sand were carried away years ago for industrial purposes. Many of the original trees, some of them beautiful black walnut, have been cut down to provide fuel for a lime kiln that operated on the point years ago. Yet the sand dunes still remain, and the old trees have been replaced with others including tall poplars and pines.

When Pere Aveneau arrived at the point, only the Indians and a few venturesome Europeans had been there before him. Game abounded and wolves were common.

After a stay at the point, Pere Aveneau took up his missionary work among the Miami Indians. He was so successful and so popular with them that when he was recalled in 1707, the Miami grew so unruly it was necessary to have Pere Aveneau return to them. Worn out from his labors, he died in Quebec at the age of 61.

The first permanent house built on Point Abino was constructed in the late 1790's by a family named Dennis. Built of logs, the one-and-a-half story house was located on the south side of Yacht Club Hill, near the present Holloway Memorial Chapel. The chapel was erected in 1894 in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Holloway, who once owned all the land from what is known as Hayes Hill to the tip of the point.

Holloway held the land under a deed from the Crown, but his neighbor, J. Ottoway Page, also claimed the land. The cause of the dispute was a surveyor's error, which gave water frontage to Page when actually his land didn't have any.

The Privy Council, London, England, awarded Page the property known as the Pine Woods, and Allen I. Holloway, Isaac's son, was given an easement for a right of way along the waterfront to his land.

In 1892 Holloway sold the land, consisting of 216 lots, to a group of Buffalo businessmen for \$27,000. These men composed the Point Abino Association.

During the last half of the 19th century the point was more industrial than residential. At various times there was a sawmill, a lime kiln, a sand hopper, a small railroad and two boarding houses. One boarding

house was run by a Mrs. Ford, who was succeeded by Mrs. Hiram Fyfe. This housed most of the engineers of the sand hopper located on the west shore, while the sand shovelers lived in shanties on the site of the present Yacht Club.

The lime quarry was one of several located on the Canadian shore operated by the firm of Fox and Holloway. Much of the cement used in construction around Buffalo during that period came from this source. Some of it was carried by barges up the lake as far as Cleveland. These big barges would tie up at docks built near the present site of Bragg's fishing dock, and at a dock on the west shore. The horse-drawn railroad would haul lime from the kiln to a small warehouse; later it would be shipped to Buffalo.

No history of the point would be complete without some mention of the Pan-American houses. Two dwellings, purchased after the Exposition closed in 1901, were hauled to the point in hay racks. The house purchased by Henry Dickinson, formerly the Wisconsin State Building at the exposition, was carted from its site in Delaware Park in forty-eight loads. It still stands on the Point Abino Road. The other house, known as the explorers' headquarters in "darkest Africa", was bought by James A. Johnson; it was torn down in the late 1940's.

An old Indian Burial Ground is located within a few hundred feet of the Buffalo Yacht Club building near what used to be an Indian village. The tribe was exterminated by one of the Iroquois tribes.

Pt. Abino is a botanist's paradise because of the many species of flora found there. Although the shore line is now almost completely surrounded with summer homes, the interior still retains much of the wild beauty that first attracted Father Aveneau and others to the area.

The water around the point holds the remains of many ships and barges that met with disaster. Many sailing ships sought shelter from raging storms behind the protective point in what is now Bay Beach. Yet the point which sheltered so many, also took its toll. The reefs off the point have caught many ships, including a large lake freighter which ran aground in a dense fog in the 1920's while heavily loaded with wheat and flax. Its steel plates still can be seen on the bottom in calm days.

A U. S. Coast Guard lightship which was stationed about six miles off the point went down in a severe storm in the fall of 1913 with the loss of all 12 men aboard. A lighthouse was erected on the point by the Canadian government in 1917 to warn ships away from this danger spot.

Those who lived on the point in the early days were far more isolated from Buffalo than the present residents are. There were no roads to the point, although a bus service operated by Webb Haun ran along the shore to Crystal Beach. Most of the people living in the area commuted to Buffalo via the Crystal Beach boat.

About this time a launch service began between the point, the Buffalo Canoe Club, located in the bay, and Crystal Beach. The 40-foot *Myrtle*, operated by Cyrenius Michner, used to meet all the boats but was driven out of business by the larger and better known *Marion L.*, owned by Charles F. Adams. The 51-foot *Marion L* went out fair weather or foul for thirteen years, until it was forced out of business by the opening of the Peace Bridge in 1927. The *Marion L* served as a tender in Buffalo harbor for more than 35 years after its Canadian service. Rumor has it that she even served briefly as a rum runner during Prohibition days. If so, she was not alone, for many coves and inlets along the Canadian shore made them ideal spots for bootlegging activities. Drinking was legal in Canada but illegal in the U. S. Smugglers used to buy their whiskey openly in Canada and get customs permits to export it to Cuba. With perfectly straight faces they would set off in small open boats from the Canadian shore for Cuba and return in a few hours, their mission accomplished.

Crystal Beach

Crystal Beach Amusement Park originally was started in 1888 as a religious assembly ground. The purpose, according to the founder, John F. Rebstock, was "for the spiritual and mental uplift of the common people," and the central theme was to be relieved "by a few choice sideshow attractions."

A "sort of combination camp meeting ground, Chautauqua Assembly and continuous circus," it was modeled after several other communities of the time, such as Cottage City, Martha's Vineyard and Chautauqua. It featured several small hotels of the "bowl and pitcher" type, tents, lunchrooms, an auditorium and a big amphitheater located just under the ridge where the assemblies were held.

The Assembly House, on the beach front where the bathhouse is now, was the largest of the hotels and was used for housing the entertainers. Later named The Royal, it was destroyed by fire in 1923.

Although almost 150,000 people visited the area in a season during the camp meeting days, the original idea had to be abandoned after two

years when it was discovered that the sideshows which fringed the colony were attracting more attention than the main program. As Rebstock later commented:

“Oil and water don’t mix. Even the ministers and Sunday school teachers in the crowds seemed to be more interested in the side shows than they were in the services, concerts and lectures which formed the chief part of the program.”

In 1890, at the suggestion of a party of prominent Buffalo city officials, among them Mayor Erastus C. Knight, Rebstock named the place Crystal Beach, for the crystal clear water and sand there. He then wired to Detroit for the *Dove*, an old-style side-wheeler and the first of a long succession of passenger boats to bring people over to the beach from Buffalo.

Rebstock set about creating a recreational resort, acting as general manager, excursion agent, dock master, ticket taker, and even pilot of the boat at times. The earliest concessions were the merry-go-round, made in Tonawanda; the ferris wheel, and the scenic railway.

The religious side was not entirely forgotten. A little mission conducted mass every Sunday morning in the old roller skating rink. This continued until 1905 when St. George Catholic Church on Ridge Road was built. A new St. George was constructed in 1964. The old church was purchased by private interests and moved to another location to be used as a residence.

The land on which the amusement park now stands originally was farm land. Parts of three different farms were acquired, the principal one being the John Schooley Farm extending along the lakefront for 1,000 feet and all the way back to the Humberstone Road. Some of the land was said to contain the finest orchards in Welland County.

Rebstock had three associates named Hickman, Jenkins and Palmer when he started. In 1908 the Crystal Beach Co., which had been incorporated by them in 1890, sold its interest to the Lake Erie Excursion Co., a Cleveland firm which operated several lake steamers.

The new company vastly changed the appearance of the park. It rearranged the entire layout, installed a water system, drained the land and laid out the Midway. The man who engineered the changes was George M. Ricker; president of the company was Thomas J. Newman. This group ran the beach until 1922, when it was sold to the Buffalo and Crystal Beach Corp.

In the early 1930's the company went through a reorganization from which three firms emerged. The Crystal Beach Co. Ltd., retained the operating rights; the Crystal Beach Transit Co., Inc., ran the *Canadiana*, and the DHL Co., Ltd. owned the land. All three companies were controlled by the family of George C. Hall, Sr. The park was greatly expanded and is now one of the largest of its kind in North America.

Meanwhile, the community of Crystal Beach had been developing. One of the earliest cottages built in the area was named the "Rustic" and was occupied by the first village policeman, named Gilchrist, and affectionately called "Old Gillie." The village of Crystal Beach was formally incorporated in 1921 in order to install improvements such as sewers and waterworks.

Important factors in the development of the area were the natural gas from nearby wells and the dynamo located on Rebstock Rd. which supplied power to the park as early as 1900.

There have been more than a dozen Crystal Beach boats serving the park at one time or another. The *Dove*, mentioned previously, was replaced in 1891 by another sidewheeler named *Pearl*, until one Independence Day it was caught at the dock in a storm and swung sideways on the beach. None of the 900 persons aboard was injured; shortly afterwards the craft was rebuilt, overhauled and renamed the *Crystal*. It was retired from service around 1900.

The other Crystal Beach boats, many of which operated simultaneously, bore the names *Gazelle*, *Puritan*, *Ossian Bedell*, *Argyle*, *Darius Cole*, *State of New York*, *Garden City*, *Superior*, *Idlewild*, and



The *Pearl*, a sidewheeler, was one of more than a dozen Crystal Beach boats.

Buffalo Courier-Express photo

Ossifrage. In 1908 the Lake Erie Excursion Co. had a special excursion steamer, the *Americana*, built for the trade. This was followed in 1910 by a sister ship, the *Canadiana*, which made the three-hour round trip six times daily until the summer of 1956 when it was withdrawn from service, partly reflecting the increased use of cars and busses for transportation to the beach, and partly because of a riot that occurred on one of the trips the previous summer. The ship was chartered to a Cleveland firm for two years and was sold in 1958. By the middle 1960's it was a vandalized hulk tied up at the Buffalo water front.

The *Americana* was sold in 1928, the year after the Peace Bridge was opened, and was used to take passengers from the Battery in New York City to Rye Beach. She eventually was broken up for scrap.

Bay Beach

Along with the development of Crystal Beach, located on Prospect Point, and the rapid advances made by the summer colony on Point Abino, the stretch of lakefront in the bay between the two points gradually became settled.

This area, known as Bay Beach, boasts one of the finest beaches on the entire Great Lakes. The clean white sand and gradual slope make it ideal for swimming and bathing. A protected harbor, it soon became a mecca for sailors, notably those of the Buffalo Canoe Club, founded by Williams Lansing in 1885. The club, first located at the foot of Porter Ave. in Buffalo, moved around the turn of the century to a location near Point Abino. A short time later, the club moved to its present home about one and three-quarters miles from Crystal Beach after purchasing land from a Scotsman named Charles Murdock for the then high price of \$1.00 a foot. When the Club acquired additional land in the 1960's it had to pay about \$500 a foot for the adjacent beach front.

Originally, almost all of the lake front in the bay was one long series of sand dunes, separated from the mainland by swamps. Old time residents remember paddling canoes in what are now fertile back lawns. This swamp extended back from the shoreline almost 1,000 feet. A Canadian real estate man named Murray Hibbard acquired a sizable portion of the property on a foreclosed mortgage. Gradually, as more and more members of the Canoe Club and others decided to establish summer residences there, Hibbard sold his land. Two early families at Bay Beach with substantial land holdings were the Bassett and Coatsworth families.

In the early days the bay would be dotted with the tiny triangular sails of sailing canoes of the members of the Canoe Club. Gradually these gave way to larger boats, some of cruising class, and even a considerable fleet of "R" boats. Because of the shallowness of the bay, these were replaced with 21-foot Knockabouts of Canoe Club design. A fire in the late 1940's destroyed the boathouse where most of the Knockabouts were kept, and the fleet was replaced with 19-foot Lightning class sailboats. By the middle 1960's there were also larger cruising type sailboats anchored out in the bay by the Canoe Club members.

The Buffalo Yacht Club greatly expanded and improved its annex on the protected lee shore of Point Abino, about three-quarters of a mile west of the Canoe Club and the large fleets of sailboats from both of these fine clubs make a pretty picture almost every summer week-end. Many Canoe Club Lightning sailors have gained national and international fame, and by the middle 1960's the Club had four national and even world champions among its membership.

Peg Leg Railroad

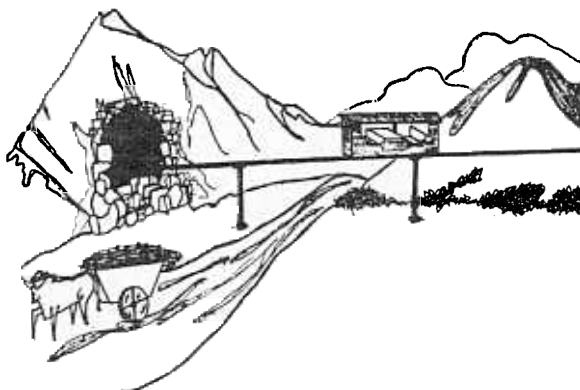
One of the most unusual railroads in the world once operated in the one and one-half mile stretch between Ridgeway and Crystal Beach. Nicknamed the "Peg Leg Railroad," the two-car train ran on a single rail raised to a height ranging from ten to thirty feet above ground.

Built in 1896 to carry commuters living in the rapidly growing colony of Crystal Beach to and from Ridgeway, where they could take the Grand Trunk Railway to Buffalo, the line was operated by the Ontario Southern Railway.

The nickname, "Peg Leg Railroad," arose from the sturdy eight-by-eight oak uprights that supported the rails. These posts formed a T with the rails, which consisted of a single center rail supporting most of the weight of the cars, and two guide rails, placed about 20 inches on either side of the center rail. The guide rails were intended primarily to keep the cars from swaying from side to side.

The five feet wide, fifteen feet long cars were mounted on two wheels, with the guide whels coming in contact with th underside of the angle-iron shaped guide rails. There was one large driving wheel on the motor car. When the train reached its maximum speed of approximately 25 miles an hour, most of the weight balanced on the center rail and the guide wheels touched the angle irons only occasionally.

During the first two years of operation the train was powered by storage batteries hung on the underside of the motor car. Once a cow standing too close to the support posts was killed when struck in the head by the batteries.



Because the batteries needed to be recharged after every trip and their weight created another problem, they were replaced with a device similar to a trolley wire during the third year.

The "Peg Leg Railroad" ran between Ridgeway and Crystal Beach.
Janice Schwarz Willard

Another problem of the elevated line was anchoring the posts firmly enough to support the moving cars. After every rain the timbers would sway in the softened earth. Frost played havoc, too. Bracing the timbers helped a little, but after a while even the braces worked loose.

The Ridgeway terminus of the line is now a planing mill yard. The station was located behind the present CNR freight shed. Telephone booths now stand at the intersection of Derby and Erie where the terminus at Crystal Beach was. A wooden loading platform was located half way between the two terminals.

Although the "Peg Leg" was mostly an elevated railroad it ran under the road through a tunnel under the ridge just outside of Ridgeway. Further on the railroad passed high over the Brachville Road because the farmers in the area insisted the railroad be built high enough to permit them to pass underneath with their wagons loaded with hay. Passengers could reach out level with the tops of orchard trees on a neighboring farm.

One of the handbills from the oldtime railroad described the unusual ride as follows,

Save time by riding on the Ontario Southern Railway. Its novelty will please you immensely. The wonderful bicycle railroad. The only road of its kind on earth. The perfection of safe rapid transit. No dust, no cinders, cool and delightful. Elegant view of the Lake, Buffalo and the surrounding country from an elevation of over 50 feet . . .

Take a ride over the tree tops on the Elevated Electric Bicycle RR. The quickest, cheapest, best and only way to the pretty village of Ridgeway in comfort. A most delightful ride, Fare five cents. Trains each way every 15 minutes. The big whistle blows before departure of trains. Listen! Then take a ride.

Henry Beecher of Albion, N. Y. was the inventor of the "Peg Leg." He constructed a model in Waterport and sold stock. Coming to Ridgeway with Nathan Fuller as a part owner, Beecher hoped to cash in on his scheme. Things did not work out and after two years Eber Cutler, who furnished the wood for the project, took over the operation to get his money back.

Revenues did not pay for operational expenses and upkeep. Many persons rode the Peg Leg just once for the novelty but felt it was not safe enough for regular travel, although there was never an accident on the line. Three years later the Ontario Southern Railway was given up as a financial failure.

Windmill Point

One famous landmark on the Canadian shore is slowly crumbling into total ruin. The wind and weather that once turned the sails of Silas Carter's grist mill on Windmill Point now are tearing the structure to pieces. After the storms of each winter, a little less is left of the once sturdy stone structure that served an area 100 miles wide.

The mill was built in 1832, the year Buffalo was incorporated. Silas Carter, who constructed it, had served Gen. George Washington in the American Revolution as a teamster, and had lived under the general's roof for three months. Born in New Jersey in 1758, Carter was only 16 at the start of the Revolution and was considered too young for the ranks.

After the war England tried to attract new settlers for her remaining colony in Canada. Carter went to what is now known as Windmill Point in the early 1780's, and received a free grant of 400 acres from the government of Upper Canada. At that time Buffalo was non-existent, there being little more than the log hut of an Indian trader on the site where the city stands now.

In those days it was no simple matter to convert wheat into flour. Unless the farmer took his grain to a mill, he had to grind it himself by one of two tedious methods. One way of doing it was to use the slow, hand "pepper mills" supplied to the settlers by the government. An-

other way, only slightly better, was to grind it on the smooth top of a hardwood stump with a flat stone roped to a springy sapling.

For many years Carter loaded his wheat, two bushels at a time, into a canoe and paddled down the lake shore and Niagara River to Chipewewa Creek. There he would disembark, hoist the wheat on his shoulders and follow the Indian trail to the mill at the Falls. Late at night he would return with his precious flour, his load much lightened by the miller's fee.

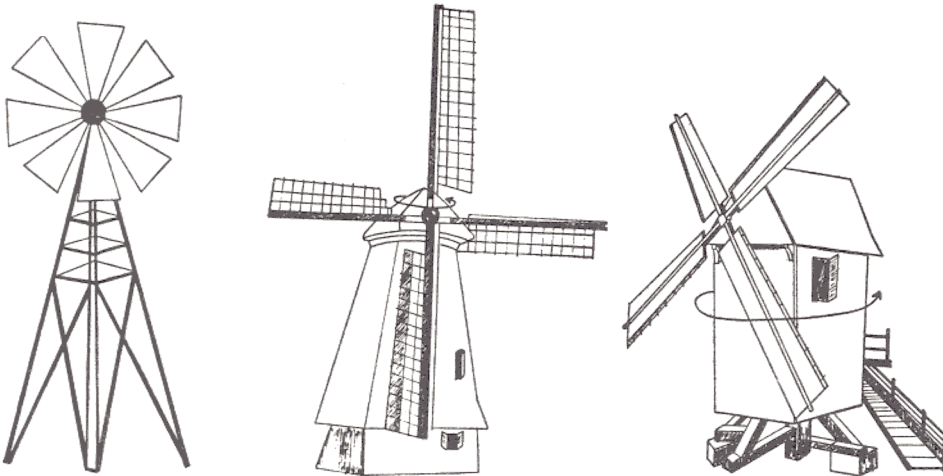
After some particularly lean years, notably the "hungry summer" of 1816, also known as the "cold summer", "poverty year" and "eighteen hundred and froze to death," Carter decided to build his mill. He felt himself better suited for the life of a miller than that of a farmer. There was plenty of limestone nearby and a kiln was built to burn the lime for the walls of the mill. One millstone was built up from broken boulders found on the farm, but the second run of burr stones was brought over on the ice from Buffalo.

The three-story, 60-foot-high mill was completed in the autumn. Circular in shape, the mill was of the tower variety rather than of the smock or post types also common at that period. The tower and smock mills each have a solid foundation surmounted by a super-structure known as a cap, which looks like a small house. The cap revolved on a track or kerb, a feature developed in the 17th Century whereby a fan-tail was built projecting from the rear of the cap.

Power was supplied by four sails, also called sweeps or swifts, suspended on long arms projecting from the cap. When the winds became too strong these sails could be reefed and even furled. Windmill Point is noted for its strong winds. During gusty storms the strain on the sweeps was dangerous, and the miller had to be on guard constantly to unmesh the gears and furl the sails during sudden blows.

The miller's work was never done. If the huge canvas covered swifts didn't need repairing, or if one or more of them had not fallen to the ground, then the inner machinery needed attention. The mill operated whenever there was wind, night or day. Sometimes it would run around the clock to grind grain accumulated on windless days.

The grain was lifted to the hopper by a sack hoist driven by the brake wheel. In order to keep grain flowing properly during the grinding process, the hopper extension was joggled by a device called a "damsel" attached to the millstone spindle. The "damsel" frequently got out of order and was known as the "miller's troublesome child."



Styles of mills. Post, tower and smock.

Janice Schwarz Willard

In spite of the difficulties of operation, the mill was kept busy for more than 40 years. Some farmers came sixty miles to have their grist ground into flour. The trip would take about five days, two days each way and one day at the mill. In the 1840's some farmers from Eden and other places on the American shore brought their grain across Lake Erie on the ice.

In the early days, travelers going to and from the mill might be waylaid by renegade Indians. The most traveled route to the mill is now known as the Windmill Point East Rd. It extended all the way to Garrison Rd. and down to the lakeshore. The farmers would then turn right and drive along the beach to the mill.

Some farmers took to canoes to avoid Indians. The big grain canoes would stay well out from shore and land at a point just a few feet from the windmill. Farmers coming by land would quarter their stock in a small barn about a quarter of a mile east of the mill. Carter's house which burned about 1927 was located within 100 feet of the barn. Its stone foundation still can be seen.

Sometimes the miller employed by Carter would be marooned for days during severe winter storms. The storehouse and the mill itself are believed to have been used as barracks by the Queen's Own during the Fenian Raid of 1866.

In addition to the mill Carter managed his farm, a brick kiln, a lime kiln and yard, and operated a tannery specializing in the production of handmade boots. He even preached once in a while.

It is not certain how long Carter owned the mill, but it eventually was sold to Old Miller Mann, a grandfather of George R. Mann of Ridge-

way. Also uncertain is the exact date the mill ceased operation. It is thought to have been sometime between 1875 and 1880. Probably what happened was that in later years the mill came to be used less and less as its machinery wore out. Some old residents recall seeing the mill operate in 1933 with only two of the four wings in place.

Well known to travelers of bygone days was a natural well located on Windmill Point near the shore and about 1,000 feet east of the mill. The bottom of the spring is less than a foot below the surface of the ground. About 1870, a hollow log stump was placed over the well, making a natural drinking fountain. The spring filled the stump to the brim, spilling crystal clear, cool water over the sides winter and summer.

The water was so pure that, although farmers used to water their stock from the stump, the slight mineral taste made it a delight for thirsty travelers. Because of neglect the stump well became clogged, and now only a bush marks the spot where it stood.

Harbor Breakwater

Nearly all the huge stone blocks which form a large part of Buffalo's breakwater were mined from a limestone quarry on Windmill Point near the turn of the century. The sturdy breakwater system, the world's largest at the time it was built, extends almost five miles along the waterfront.

The Windmill Point quarry, which supplied the stone, was operated by the firm of Hughes Bros. and Bangs of Syracuse. It opened in 1895 and operated for about eight years; later, it was reopened for three years to supply some of the stone for the Cleveland and Sandusky, O., breakwalls. Now the 15-acre quarry is filled with beautiful, clear water.

When the quarry was first opened, laborers were paid \$1.25 for a ten-hour day. Drillers, more highly skilled workers, were paid \$2 a day. The quarry contained huge derricks for lifting the stone on to the hopper cars of the narrow gauge railway that ran from the quarry to the long stone dock on the shore.

The stone dock has weathered the storms of many seasons and still remains in fairly good condition. The lake storms greatly hindered work on the breakwall, however. On November 21, 1900, a severe storm caused considerable damage to the loading dock, narrow gauge railroad tracks, and the structure housing the engines that operated the hoisting derricks. Three scows moored to the dock were cast adrift and beached nearby.

One of the best fishing places around Windmill Point is over the spot about one mile from shore and three quarters of a mile east of the windmill where two of the stone barges sank in a wild gale in 1900.

Operations in the quarry were on a large scale. One pound of dynamite was used for every 42 tons of stone. During the 1902 season more than 5,000 pounds of dynamite were exploded. The total output of the quarry for the breakwater project was 1,023,065.2 tons of rubblestone.

The spring at the bottom of the quarry provided natural drinking fountains and quickly filled the quarry when the mining operations ceased. The quarry has been pumped out three times—for the Cleveland job, to recover the boilers and machinery left in it and during World War I to recover the scrap iron in the tracks and abandoned machinery.

Several other quarries are located relatively close together on Windmill point. The one near the Windmill Point East Rd. is frequently used as a swimming hole by vacationers. It was operated by the Law Construction Co. for three years about 1910 and is much smaller than the former Hughes Bros. and Bangs quarry.

Another large industrial operation on Windmill Point was the shipment of sand. At one time there was a tremendous sand dune back of the old windmill. It extended all the way to Burger Rd., now called Windmill Point West Rd. The sand from these dunes was removed by the firms of Fox & Holloway and Carroll Bros. A large sand hopper was built out into the water, and from it sand barges were filled.

The sand was used in Buffalo for plastering and for making concrete. Much of the breakwall that is not made from the limestone blocks from Windmill Point was constructed of cement blocks made with Windmill Point sand. Some of these blocks weighed as much as 19 tons.

The sand at Windmill Point is of very high quality, fine and white. It contains a quantity of emery, and if a magnet is thrust into it, the magnet will come up with particles of fine emery dust sticking to it. Most of the sand taken from the dunes was shoveled by hand - a back-breaking job. One oldtime resident recalls that many men from Ridgeway would walk to Windmill Point every morning, shovel sand all day and then make the long walk home.



Quarry operations at Windmill Point.
Janice Schwarz Willard

The surrounding country was used as a hunting and fishing ground by the Neuter Indians and later by some of the Iroquois Nations. Several Indian campsites are listed along Garrison Road, one of which is near Rose Hill Road. Indian relics have been found including arrow-heads, celts, and hammerstones in the area.

The sand excavators discovered charcoal from Indian camp fires beneath forty feet of sand, while the trees that grew above them were more than a century old.

Erie Beach Amusement Park

Few persons know the land the Erie Beach Amusement Park occupied figured prominently in an early morning attack during the War of 1812, or that it was a northern terminus of the "underground railway", when slaves were smuggled to freedom in pre-Civil War days.

When American forces were in command of Ft. Erie, Capt. Nathan Towson of the U. S. Regulars had a battery of five guns on Snake Hill about a mile south of the Village of Ft. Erie. In a pre-dawn attack on August 15, 1814, a column of British troops under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Fischer was observed approaching through the semi-darkness.

The American battery of 18-pounders opened fire on the column with such intensity that the glare of the guns lighted up the sky. The British, finding themselves repulsed at all points, retreated with their shattered column after having lost 120 prisoners and a large number of scaling ladders, picks, axes, and guns. In memory of that defense the hill was nicknamed "Towson's Lighthouse."

Originally Ft. Erie bore the name Gai-gwaah-geh, an Indian word meaning, "the place of the hats." Soon after the first white men came to the area a terrific battle occurred on Lake Erie between the French and the Indians. The French were defeated, their boats sunk, and the men drowned. Several hats of crew members floated ashore at the place where the fort was subsequently built, and the Indians identified the place by that incident. Later, the British renamed it Waterloo in honor of the soldiers in the War of 1812 who fought under the Duke of Wellington.

Snake Hill in the 1850's had a considerable Negro colony. Located near the American border, it was used as the final stop on the famous "underground railway."

Since slavery had been abolished in Canada, the Negroes headed



The Casino at Erie Beach Amusement Park.

Buffalo Courier-Express photo

for the nearest Canadian soil they could find. Ft. Erie and Snake Hill received many refugee slaves, and although most of them moved later to other places, at one time colored camp meetings held in the old Snake Hill Grove attracted hundreds of visitors from both sides of the border.

One of the slaves to come to Snake Hill was Dan Banks, whose face now adorns the box of a well known cooked breakfast cereal.

In 1885, Dr. W. B. Pierce, Edwin Baxter and Benjamin Baxter, founded the resort at Snake Hill Grove that came to be known as Erie Beach Amusement Park and was primarily a picnic ground. When Frederick J. Weber bought the grove just before the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901, he changed the name to Fort Erie Grove and installed a merry-go-round and a ride called the Figure-Eight.

Weber sold out in 1910 to Frank V. E. Bardol, who vastly expanded the establishment. The big casino was started that year and completed in 1911. At that time it was the most modern dance hall in the area.

Erie Beach, as Bardol called the place, did not have a very good swimming beach, so the world's largest outdoor swimming pool was constructed in front of the casino. There were two pools, one for children and another for adults.

A large stadium was located behind the pony track and old mill on Lake Shore Rd. and many Olympic stars appeared there. The carefully tended parks and promenades featured splendid peacocks, pheasants and cranes, as well as wild pigs, timber wolves, bears and other animals.

The famous diving horses of Atlantic City were brought to thrill the crowds, estimated at well over 20,000 on summer weekends. Some of the better known rides included the Lindy Loop and the Wildcat.

In the early days the crowds from Buffalo reached Erie Beach by taking the ferry to Fort Erie, and the Ft. Erie, Snake Hill and Pacific Railroad, otherwise known as "The Sandfly Express," to the park. Some of the ferryboats became quite well known, such as the *Mascot*, which was the first excursion boat out of Buffalo to be equipped with electric lights. Other boats operating were the *Hope*, the *Niagara*, and, at times, the *Union*.

When the Erie Beach pier was built about 1910, ferries carried passengers directly from the foot of Main Street. Steamers operating then included the *Ossian Bedell*, *Chicora*, *Frontier*, and *United Shores*.

The first engine on The Sandfly Express was known as "Old Eunice." Built in London, Ont. in 1885, the train had four open coaches. After serving on the line for a few years, "Old Eunice" was replaced by a saddle-back, boiler-type locomotive, known as "No. 29". "No. 29" was later dismantled and used for scrap metal but "Old Eunice" hauled logs for many years in a northern logging camp.

In 1901 came the first of two famous engines, both called "The Dummy". When the Manhattan Elevated Railway Co. decided to electrify its lines, two of the old engines, known in New York as "Puffing Billies," were brought to serve on the Ft. Erie, Snake Hill and Pacific.

When the amusement park closed for the last time on Labor Day, 1930, the Fort Erie, Snake Hill and Pacific also ceased operations. The two trains with their little green cars were sold at auction and during World War II were cut up for scrap.

Some of the concessions and rides at the park were taken to Crystal Beach, others went to amusement parks in Ohio. The Dodgem was taken to London, Ont. Some of the train coaches were made into summer homes, and plans were made to turn the park into a residential resort.

One Sunday in September, 1935, another well known landmark, the Erie Beach Hotel, caught fire and was destroyed. Fire companies from Buffalo raced across the Peace Bridge but were unable to save the thirty year old building. Now, all that remains of the once popular Erie Beach resort are overgrown walks, crumbling piers, and the deserted casino, the only tangible reminders of an era passed into memory.

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